

A WOMAN INTERVIEWS THE PRESIDENT For the Journal.

The First Interview Ever Given at the White House to a Newspaper Reporter by the Nation's Chief Executive.

By Eva McDonald Valesch.

A Journal young woman during the past week interviewed the President of the United States. This is the first time that a newspaper woman was ever received in the White House by a President of the United States for the purpose of an interview for publication.

Nor only is the distinction unique, but the interview between Miss Valesch and the President is decidedly interesting and full of personality.

It was no formal conversation, but a real talk, and for the reason that a thing of the kind was never done before the conversation is here repeated just as it took place between the young Journal woman and the Chief Executive in Cabinet Room of the White House on the afternoon of Tuesday last:

Coming recently from the West to Washington, I, like many others, wanted to see President McKinley. More than that, I wanted to talk with him.

I had heard him described as a man of broad sympathies, who took an interest in social and industrial, as well as purely political, problems. I wanted to talk with him about these things.

My desire was gratified. I went to the White House by appointment at 1 o'clock, and was received by the President in the Cabinet room. My escort to the White House, who happened, by the way, to be very friendly with the President, introduced me as a person interested in political and economic problems, and desirous of paying my respects to the President.

These facts were adorned by him with various and sundry complimentary fringes which it would not be in good taste to reproduce. The President listened courteously and greeted me with a hearty grasp of the hand and kindly expression of interest, just as if he believed I were a person of some importance.

The President's Courtesy of Manner.

He sat on a low chair near me and chatted in as easy and unaffected a manner as if he had been a private citizen. His real kindness and courtesy of manner would make even a shy person feel at ease, and I don't happen to belong to that type myself.

Mr. McKinley displays considerable tact in concealing the fact that he probably talks of similar topics to several scores of people every day. In fact, he was kind enough to intimate that he liked to meet people with hobbies, and who had no personal axes to grind. After the first greetings were over I said:

"Mr. President, I feel as if I were intruding in coming to talk to you on general topics, when there are so many people in the anterooms hungering and thirsting for office."

Mr. McKinley laughed very cordially and said:

"I am glad to meet you because your purpose is different from theirs. I like to meet the people—who don't want office. I enjoy chatting with those who come in for a few minutes and say 'God bless you.' They are the people who sustain and cheer me under the pressure of work and responsibility which is forced upon me by my office."

"I came to see you because I am a student of practical affairs, especially of the problems relating to social and industrial questions. I had rather talk with a statesman about such things than read theories out of books and try to apply them."

The President seemed to approve of my thirst for knowledge from the fountain head, and gravely replied:

"You are right about that. Experience and observation are the best teachers in any line of work."

McKinley Asks Questions.

Then he began to ask me questions, and let me say right here that I do not believe Mr. McKinley is laboring under any delusion about the return of prosperity. He knows that it has not registered to any perceptible degree, and admits the fact with the gravity and simplicity becoming in a great statesman. His conversation indicated that he is keeping a sharp lookout for the first indications of better times, and he seizes on every straw which may show how the wind blows, but he did not, even by implication, attempt to tell me that American workmen are prosperous, or that the ante-election promises of his party have been fulfilled. I liked his frankness and courage in dealing with this rather delicate problem.

I told him I came recently from the West. He wanted to know if I had seen any signs of returning prosperity in that section.

"Don't you think times are improving in the West?" he asked me, point blank.

Through my mind there flitted a vision of collapsed real estate booms, unemployed people, closed factories and broken banks. While I would have liked to make a more courteous reply, I was forced to say: "I am not at all sure of that. We have so many idle people and wages are so very uncertain."

Looking Toward the West for Hope.

President McKinley bowed his head thoughtfully for a minute and looked up with a brighter countenance and said, tentatively: "But crops are going to be very good in the West, and that will help."

I suppose I must look like a farmer's daughter, and he assumed that I would know all about agricultural conditions. I happen, however, to be one of those who spend all their time in cities, but I thought it safe to assent, and said: "Yes, sir, I believe a good crop is expected."

I forebore to remind him that we have had good crops for the last three years, and that times have not improved as a consequence. The next moment I was glad I had not said more, because Mr. McKinley evidently puts some faith in the agricultural forecast. He continued in an earnest way:

"I really think there is gradual improvement. An Iowa Senator was telling me very recently that the farmers in the Northwest are more prosperous and satisfied now than for a long time past. I think there is a gradual improvement in conditions."

The Tariff Lesson of the Continent.

"I visited European countries last year and studied social and economic conditions," I said, "and as a result I became converted to your views on the tariff. I had been rather sceptical before."

"I am glad to hear that," responded the President. "I find others who have observed European conditions expressing views similar to yours. A knowledge of wages and conditions on the

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Continent is apt to make one recognize the value of a tariff to protect American workmen."

"I do not think now that a high tariff will of itself insure good wages, but I am willing to admit that it gives a margin so the wage earners can organize and perhaps obtain better wages."

To my surprise President McKinley assented to this proposition at once, and replied:

"Yes, when we have a high tariff we keep the employment here for our own workmen, and, as you say, leave a margin for their wages to rise."

This was liberal enough, but I was not quite satisfied yet, so I said: "Don't you think, Mr. President, there should be a tariff on European labor coming here to compete with our workmen as well as on the product of their labor?"

Again he was delightfully frank and straightforward. His reply was:

"Yes, that is a very reasonable proposition, and I think you will agree with me that much has been done in that direction. We could not cut off immigration altogether. That would not be advisable, but we are gradually finding out what are the best and wiser restrictions in relation to it."

I was about to question him as to his views on the new woman when Senator Platt was announced, and, of course, that settled it. The interview was concluded.

Neither the expression of the face nor the general manner of the man carry out the suggestion of sternness given in pictures. President McKinley is a man of remarkable magnetic power. When he grasps your hand the magnetic force is immediately apparent. He does and appears like a person who has warm blood in his veins, who is emotional and impulsive, though he does not give the impression of remarkable individuality and force which I had expected.

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